



Course Syllabus

Philosophy 192: Black Political Thought

Spring Semester 2022

Professor Erin Kelly
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12+ (W 6-8:30pm)
Office Hours: Mon. 3-4pm
and by appointment

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Office Hours: Wed 3-4pm

This capstone senior seminar for civic studies majors will explore currents in Black political thought from the late nineteenth century to the present day and what is distinctive about this tradition. We will consider the relation between Black political thought and the quest for autonomy, community, political membership, and equality through political resistance, protest, community organizing, cultural affirmation, and social movements, from the slavery abolitionism to the civil rights movement to the Movement for Black Lives. Themes to be explored include: race and racism, Black solidarity, civil rights, Black power, Black feminism, policing and prisons, abolition democracy, and Black aesthetics and expressive culture. Participants will be asked to apply insights to current questions of pressing social concern.

Books ordered for the course:

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along The Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007)

Tommie Shelby: *We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005)

Please order on your own: Winfred Rembert, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (Bloomsbury, 2021). (It is currently 50% off at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Target.)

All other readings available on Canvas: <https://canvas.tufts.edu/courses/35744>.

Schedule of Readings

January 19 **Overviews**

Toni Morrison, "Black Matters," *Playing in the Dark*
Charles Mills, "An Illuminating Blackness"
George Yancy, "Black Philosophy and the Crucible of Lived History"
Kristie Dodson, "Radical Love: Black Philosophy as Deliberate Acts of Inheritance"

January 26 **(In)visibility**

Paul C. Taylor, "No Negroes in Connecticut: Seers, Seen," *Black is Beautiful*, Ch. 2
James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew"
Watch: [Ailey](#) ([Links to an external site.](#)) (Dir. J. Wignot). Available at PBS: American Masters
Nina Simone, ["Mississippi Goddam"](#)

February 2 **Roots/Rupture/Dispossession**

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, Prologue and Chs. 1, 2, 12.
Erica Edwards, "The Morning After: Black Political Culture in the Age of Terror"
Watch: [High on the Hog](#) (Netflix), episode one

February 9 **The Race Concept**

Lionel McPherson, "The Invention of Race" (sections 1-2, 8)
Toni Morrison, Speech at Portland State, 1975.

February 16 **Double Consciousness**

Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Philosophy in America*, Intro, Ch. 2
W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"

February 23 **Bondage and Freedom**

Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, Ch. 5 (pp. 168-205)
Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, excerpt

March 2 no class/**first paper due**

March 9 **The Jim Crow South**

Winfred Rembert, *Chasing Me to My Grave*
Visit with Patsy Rembert

March 16 **Civil Rights/Black Power Movements**

Brandon Terry, "MLK Now," *Boston Review*
Martin Luther King, "Black Power," *Where Do We Go From Here?*
Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation"
Peniel E. Joseph "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field"

- March 30 **Solidarity**
Tommie Shelby, *We Who are Dark*, Chs. 4, 6, conclusion (also pp. 67-71 of ch. 2)
- April 6 **Black Feminism**
Combahee River Statement (1977)
Jennifer C. Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, Introduction, Ch. 2, Conclusion, Coda.
Keeanga-Yamattha Taylor, "Until Black Women are Free, None of Us Will Be Free."
second paper due
- April 13 **Prisons and/or Restorative Justice**
Angela Davis, *The Angela Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (pp. 39-107)
Eugene Ivey, "Accountability and Acceptance"
Lydialyle Gibson, "Restoring Justice"
- April 20 **Racialized Punishment and American Values**
Glenn Loury, *Race, Incarceration and American Values*
Derrick Bell, "Divining Our Racial Themes," *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*
Orlando Patterson, "Slavery as Human Parasitism," *Slavery and Social Death* (pp. 334-342)
- April 27 **Prison Art/Undoing Prison Logics**
Nicole Fleetwood, "Carceral Aesthetics: Penal Space, Time, and Matter," *Marking Time*.
Simone Browne, "Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return," *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Ch. 2.
- May 6 **Final paper due**

Course Requirements

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| Class attendance and participation | 10% |
| Six "content reflections" | 15% |
| Three short papers (5-6 pages each) | 25% each |
| <u>Or</u> one short paper (5-6 pages) and one longer paper (10-12 pages) | 25%/50% |

Content reflections

I have created a "Content Reflections" portion of the Canvas course site for each of the thirteen weeks of the semester. You should post brief thoughts –do not write more than 300 or so words per posting – on some aspect of the assigned materials **for six of the semester's thirteen weeks**. You can either start a discussion thread or respond to someone else's comment. We encourage you to include references to current happenings in the news and social media, etc., as well as campus and community events. Because postings are meant to precede and sometimes provoke class discussion, please submit them by noon on Wednesdays.

Course Policies

Late papers may be marked down if the lateness is unexcused.
Incompletes will be granted only in special circumstances and provided that you make your request before the last paper is due.

Learning Objectives. In this course you will learn:

1. How to read, analyze, and articulate the arguments and viewpoints of Black political thinkers, both historical and contemporary.
2. How to recognize distinctive and characteristic currents of Black American political thought.
3. How to identify the substance and structure of a philosophical argument and evaluate it critically.
4. How to produce a cogent argument and express it with perspicuity, both in writing and orally.
5. How to develop and defend one's own position with respect to problems that have occupied both historical and contemporary political philosophers in the Black American tradition.
6. How to anticipate and even welcome objections to one's views, how to apply the principle of charity to others' opinions, and how to address objections and competing views effectively and respectfully in one's writing.
7. How to reflect critically on current events with attention to matters of justice and fairness.